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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000345

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: STAFFERS SAY PRESIDENT SARGSIAN TO OUTLINE PROCESS
FOR RESOLVING DETAINEE ISSUE ON MAY 28

Classified By: DCM JOSEPH PENNINGTON, REASONS 1.4(B,D)

¶1. (C) During a May 20 lunch with DCM, Presidential Chief of Staff Vigen Sargsian and presidential advisor (and son-in-law) Misha Minasian promised that President Sargsian would make a "major announcement" on May 28 that will outline a way forward toward the release of all March 1 detainees. The advisors declined to provide details of the pending announcement, but said it would be "a signal from the highest level" that all cases would be resolved. Minasian indicated that the move represents a "goodwill gesture" to Levon Ter-Petrossian's Armenian National Congress on the eve of the hotly contested Yerevan mayoral election on May 31.

¶2. (C) Sargsian and Minasian did not answer directly when asked whether some detainees would actually be released on the day of the announcement, but their body language strongly suggested that the release of detainees would come later. DCM said the U.S. would welcome an indication from the President of his intention to release the detainees, but noted that actual releases would inspire more confidence that this issue was finally moving toward resolution. This would be especially important in advance of the next meeting of the MCC Board, currently scheduled for June 10. The advisors took the point, but remained non-committal on the question of timing.

¶3. (C) Comment: May 28 is the day Armenians celebrate the founding of the first Armenian Republic (1918), and rumors have been circulating for some time -- including among opposition supporters -- that some movement on detainees could happen that day. This is the first time, however, that such rumors have been confirmed by senior officials. The timing is probably not coincidental: in addition to the MCC Board meeting in June, the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) will take up the detainee question in a session on June 24. It is also possible that President Sargsian believes a positive gesture on detainees before the Yerevan election will win some votes for the ruling Republican Party on May 31. It could also take the wind out of the sails of post-election protesters, assuming that LTP fails to win the election and there is perceived tampering with the vote. The calculation could be that the opposition will be less likely to take to the streets if the release of more than 50 of their long-jailed comrades seems imminent. End comment.
YOVANOVITCH